

Laden, leader of the Al Qaida terrorist organization; and Abu Faraj al-Libbi, senior Al Qaida associate arrested in Pakistan on April 30.

Remarks on the National Day of Prayer

May 5, 2005

The President. Good morning, and welcome to the White House. Laura and I are honored to join you on this important occasion.

I want to thank Shirley Dobson, the chairman of the National Day of Prayer. Thank you for organizing this event, and thank you for your wonderful comments. I'm glad to see you brought your husband, Jim, with you. *[Laughter]* It's good to have Vonette Bright with us; welcome. I appreciate my fellow Texan, Max Lucado, for his wonderful prayer. Thank you very much; welcome. I'm glad you and Denalyn are with us. Rabbi, thank you for your reading of the psalm. It's good to have your family here; welcome. I appreciate Father Charles Pope, pastor of St. Thomas More Catholic Church, here in DC. Kind of sounded more like a Baptist preacher to me. *[Laughter]*

Laura and I are proud Methodists, and we're pleased to be here with Bishop Peter Weaver, who is the president of the Council of Methodist Bishops, who will deliver the closing prayer. Thank you.

It's such an honor to be here with the St. Olaf Choir led by Anton Armstrong. You've got such beautiful music. Thank you for sharing with us. I'm sure they're having a prayerful moment right now—*[laughter]*—praying that I hurry up and finish because they have been standing for quite a while. *[Laughter]*

The National Day of Prayer is an annual event established in 1952 by an Act of the United States Congress. Yet, this day is part of a broader tradition that reaches back to the beginnings of America. From the landing of the pilgrims at Plymouth Rock to the launch of the American Revolution, the men and women who founded this Nation in freedom relied on prayer to protect and preserve it.

Today, prayer continues to play an important part in the personal lives of many Americans. Every day, millions of us turn to the

Almighty in reverence and humility. Every day, our churches and synagogues and mosques and temples are filled with men and women who pray to our Maker. And almost every day, I am given a special reminder of this great generosity of spirit when someone comes up and says, "Mr. President, I'm praying for you."

Prayer has been an important part of American public life as well. Many of our forefathers came to these shores seeking the freedom to worship. The first Continental Congress began by asking the Almighty for the wisdom that would enable them to settle things on the best and surest foundation. And when our Founders provided that sure foundation in the Declaration of Independence, they declared it a self-evident truth that our right to liberty comes from God.

And so we pray as a nation for three main reasons. We pray to give thanks for our freedom. Freedom is our birthright because the Creator wrote it into our common human nature. No Government can ever take a gift from God away. And in our great country, among the freedoms we celebrate is the freedom to pray as you wish or not at all. And when we offer thanks to our Creator for the gift of freedom, we acknowledge that it was meant for all men and women and for all times.

Second, we pray for help in defending the gift of freedom from those who seek to destroy it. Washington prayed at Valley Forge. Franklin Roosevelt sent American troops off to liberate a continent with his D-day prayer. Today, we pray for the troops who are defending our freedom against determined enemies around the globe. We seek God's blessing for the families they have left behind, and we commit to Heaven's care those brave men and women he has called home.

Audience members. Amen.

The President. Finally, we pray to acknowledge our dependence on the Almighty. Prayerful people understand the limits of human strength. We recognize that our plans are not always God's plans. Yet, we know that a God who created us for freedom is not indifferent to injustice or cruelty or evil. So we ask that our hearts may be aligned with His and that we may be given the strength to do what is right and help those in need.

We who ask for God's help for ourselves have a particular obligation to care for the least of our brothers and sisters within our midst.

During the funeral for Abraham Lincoln, Bishop Matthew Simpson relayed a story about a minister who told our 16th President that he hoped the Lord was on his side. Lincoln wisely replied that he was more concerned that he was on the side of the Lord, because the Lord was always on the side of right.

Freedom is a divine gift that carries with it a tremendous human responsibility. The National Day of Prayer is a day that we ask that our Nation, our leaders, and our people use the freedom we have been given wisely. And so we pray as Americans have always prayed, with confidence in God's purpose, with hope for the future, and with the humility to ask God's help to do what is right.

Thank you for coming. May God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:26 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Vonette Bright, former chairman, National Day of Prayer Task Force; Max Lucado, 2005 honorary chairman, National Day of Prayer, and his wife, Denalyn; and Rabbi Kenneth Auman, president, Rabbinical Council of America.

Interview With Dutch TV NOS

May 5, 2005

President's Upcoming Visit to the Netherlands

Q. Mr. President, thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to talk to you. You're going to Europe, commemorating 60 years of liberation in Europe. You could have gone to many countries. Why did you choose to go to Holland?

The President. First of all, Holland was a stalwart, and the people of Holland were brave and courageous when it came to resisting tyranny. And a lot of people paid a heavy price for standing for freedom in the face of fascism. As well many Americans lost their lives on Dutch soil, and it's an opportunity to praise those who fought, honor those who died, and remind people that there's more work to be done to make the world more free.

Democracy in the Middle East/War on Terror

Q. About that, more work to be done, do you see any similarities about what happened 60 years ago, the Americans, among others, liberating Europe, and what you are doing now, in the Middle East, for example?

The President. Well, it's a different situation, but there is evil in the world. There's always been evil. I believe that those who kill in the name of a great religion are evil people; people who are willing to destroy innocent life or bury people in mass graves or starve people to death are evil. And I think the free world must confront evil. The last choice is to use the military. On the other hand, sometimes you have to.

And as you know, I made a difficult decision. Some in Europe didn't agree. Some in Holland didn't agree, and I can understand that. But now we have an obligation and a duty, it seems like to me, to work together to help others become free. Freedom is universal—freedom shouldn't be just—people shouldn't view freedom as only the purview of Americans or the Dutch or Europeans. Everybody deserves to be free.

President's Leadership and Decisionmaking

Q. But the interesting thing is, Mr. President, that we all agree, also in Europe, about your goals, democracy, freedom—

The President. Sure.

Q. —safety in the world. Does it frustrate you sometimes that—for example, in the Netherlands they did a poll before you are coming now that a vast part of the population does not agree with the way you're handling world affairs, for example.

The President. Well, you know—

Q. Is it frustrating?

The President. No, it doesn't. I mean, I—

Q. It must be a little, though.

The President. No, it doesn't; it doesn't frustrate me. I make decisions on what I think is right. That's what leaders do. The other day in a press conference, I was asked about polls here in America. I said, "A leader who tries to lead based upon polls is like a dog chasing his tail." That's not how you lead.